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HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State
INFO : BONN, PRAGUE, WARSAW

Austria / Czech

FROM : AmEmbassy VIENNA

DATE: May 31, , 968

SUBJECT : Prague Meeting of the Austro-Czech Joint Technical Commission for the Danube, Morava, and Thaya Rivers (Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal Project)

REF : CERP D

Austrian Minister of Construction and Technology, Dr. Vinzenz Kotzina, recently reported to the Austrian Cabinet on the meeting of the Austro-Czech Joint Technical Commission for the Danube, Morava, and Thaya Rivers which was held in Prague from April 17 to 26.

The Joint Technical Commission was created pursuant to the Treaty of December 12, 1928 between Austria and Czechoslovakia for the Regulation of the Technical/Economic Questions concerning the Border Stretches of the Danube, Morava, and Thaya Rivers for the purpose of settling all questions which may arise from the joint river regulation work in those stretches of the rivers which form the border between the two countries. The Joint Technical Commission meets once a year either in Prague or Vienna to discuss pending problems of river construction, flood control, water pollution, etc.

Over the years, the Joint Technical Commission has proven to be a valuable and most effective instrument of cooperation since it enables the government representatives of the two countries to deal directly with each other in all relevant matters. This has led to an expansion of the scope of activities of this Commission so that it now deals with virtually all water matters affecting the two countries. A new treaty to replace the 1928 Treaty was signed in Vienna in December 1967 and is now in the process of being ratified. The new treaty provides for a widened scope of activities such as, for instance, water pollution matters. This widened scope is also evident from the title of the agreement, namely "Treaty concerning the Regulation of Water Matters in Border Waters (Abkommen ueber die Regelung der wasserwirtschaftlichen Fragen in den Grenzgewaessern).

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The Joint Technical Commission will be replaced by a Border Waters Commission, with two representatives each from the Ministry of Construction and Technology and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry on the Austrian side, and the appropriate counterparts on the Czech side. At present, the Commission consists of one Austrian and one Czech government representative (Commissioner) each of whom have the right to call in experts.

Since the regulation work on the Morava River is essentially completed, the regulation of the Thaya river will be started. New responsibilities will open for the Commission if the Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal project is realized.

In line with the practice of exchanging information, the Czechs informed the Austrians at the April Prague meeting of the latest status of the Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal project, which they have pushed vigorously in recent years. The Austrian delegates were also given the opportunity to inspect improvements made on the Czech section of the Elbe River as a first step towards realization of the Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal project. The Czechs have canalized their section of the river, built new locks and weirs, and have modernized and converted obsolete weirs and locks so as to accommodate 1,350 ton barges. The Czechs said that they would soon inaugurate the second step by beginning construction of weirs on the Czech section of the Morava river. With regard to the third step in the realization of the Danube-Oder-Elbe canal project, namely, the construction of a canal system linking the Morava-Oder and Elbe rivers, the Czechs stated that they expect to finish large-scale planning this year. They added that they would then acquaint interested countries with these plans with the aim of inviting financial participation in the project in view of the all-European function of this waterway system; it will link the Danube river region with the ports of Hamburg and Szczecin. Construction costs are estimated at 10 to 12 billion Czech crowns (about \$1,389 to 1,667 million).

There have as yet been no bilateral discussions on the project. However, a Reporter Group of the ECE Sub-Committee on Inland Water Transport, under Czech Chairmanship, has been studying the economic benefits to be derived from the project for some time. Austria, West Germany and Poland are also members of the Reporter Group. A brochure on the Danube-Oder-Elbe canal project published by the Czech Ministry of Forestry and Water Economy is enclosed as of possible interest.

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